2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4



to the majority of professing Christians. If an easy acceptance of poor and insanitary living conditions is one of the major faults of this race, as I believe it is, then such a shortcoming is easily counterbalanced by their innumerable virtues, which are seldom found in practice amongst Englishmen.

I have not had the opportunity to make a deep study of social problems in Arabia, but from my interpretation of what I have seen, I should not hesitate to lay the blame for the vices and backwardness of Arab life on the system of government which obtains in most regions. In principle it is comparable with the feudal system in Europe. Apart from the Bedouin country, where life is migratory and the tribes are tent-dwellers, the majority of Arabs are concentrated in the fertile valleys, where they can obtain water for their livestock and crops. In Oman, as in other parts of the continent, the coastal areas are ruled by paramount sheikhs, whose power is absolute and who are sometimes elected by their subjects, but who are more generally appointed by succession, the kingdom thus remaining in the hands of one family. Although many of these princely families are quite ancient, and have provided rulers for different sheikhdoms for centuries, it is not unusual to find one sheikh deposing another by force. Jealousy and a greed for more territory and power are frequently the root cause of tribal wars.

There is little that is democratic in the government of a sheikhdom. Through his judges and ministers, who are paid out of the royal purse, the sheikh administers justice. Often it is the justice of a tyrant, although some sheikhs are just and kindly and are regarded by their subjects more as 'fathers of the people' than as kings. All land belongs to the sheikh, who is theoretically custodian for his tribe, and he exacts revenues from merchants, shopkeepers, fishermen, pearling-fleet owners and merchants, camel breeders and farmers, in the form of a commission on all business, in addition to heavy taxes on the inhabitants of the towns and villages. There are, too, taxes on land and property, on fishing and pearling rights, and profits are even obtained from the sale (illegal and contrary to the treaties with the British Government, but still indulged in) of slave labour.

Apart from the pearling industry, one of the richest sources of income in Arabia is from the date plantations, and these, if not actually owned by the sheikhs, at least provide him with a handsome additional income. In recent years the Arab rulers have been considerably enriched by large sums paid for concessions by the oil